



ANTHONY'S CIRCLE

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Anthony's Circle Board of Directors
DATE: February 12, 2024

Letter of Support for HB 4084

Dear Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Wright and Hudson, Members of the Committee:

This letter is in support of House Bill 4084 which aims to improve graduation rates for Oregon foster youth through the public schools. Current state statistics show that Oregon foster youth graduation rates are tracking at less than half the rate of the general student population.

Information shows that 60% of aged out foster youth find themselves uneducated, homeless, incarcerated and struggling with substance issues, and 71% of young women are pregnant by the age 21. We believe HB4084 and [Anthony's Circle \(501C-3\)](#), provides a preventive solution to Oregon's growing crisis surrounding houselessness, incarceration and addiction issues.

HB 4084 introduces a new pilot that places a full-time educational navigator into three public high schools, guiding this population towards a successful graduation rate from 42% to 75% through a student success plan. Anthony's Circle has identified three Oregon public schools with significantly high rates of foster youth and all three have enthusiastically agreed to participate in the pilot program. Those schools are namely Portland's McDaniels High School, Albany's Timber Ridge Middle School and South Medford High School.

[Self Enhancement Inc. \(SEI\)](#), a partner of Anthony's Circle, boasts a proven track record of 98% graduation rate of underserved youth in Portland. Additionally, Anthony's Circle has a partnership with Karyn Schimmel, who has over 30 years of foster care experience. Schimmel serves as its foster care trainer to ensure school administration, faculty and staff are all 'foster-care aware'.

Anthony's Circle was established as a response to a concern over the lack of understanding of the challenges this population endures as they navigate the public school system. The organization recognizes Anthony Preston, a remarkable young man who is bright, driven, charismatic, and grew up in foster care. He is a true leader, displaying a remarkable strength of character despite enduring a lifetime of recurring trauma and numerous life challenges.

Anthony was born and raised in Portland, Oregon, where he was placed into the foster care system at the tender age of seven. His upbringing and early years were shaped by the foster care system, where he remained under the state's care until he aged out at 21. Anthony lived with multiple families, moved six times, and shared his life with nearly 100 foster brothers. His journey was far from smooth, as kids in foster care often encounter difficulties when it comes to finding a sense of belonging and building trust.

Anthony's Board of Directors includes community leader, Rhonda Meadows who has been an advocate for foster youth for decades. She is the founder of [Bridge Meadows](#), an intergenerational community in North Portland with a mission of promoting permanency, community, and caring relationships for adoptive families of foster children while offering meaningful purpose in the lives of older adults. She is also the founder of [Project Lemonade](#), a successful program that invites Portland area foster youth to shop for new and nearly new clothing at no charge. This highly successful mission builds self-esteem and sets these children up for success in school.

Other founding board members, Heidi Grenley and Maria Ponzi, have both served on [Court Appointed Special Advocates \(CASA\)](#) and Project Lemonade Boards. Learn more here <https://www.anthonyscircle.org/board-of-directors>.

We believe the definition of foster is to care and nurture. This vulnerable group has been neglected for too long. Anthony's Circle believes every child has a gift, and education is key to anyone's success. It's critical to developing confidence, growth and becoming a productive citizen of our community.

We appreciate your support of HB4084 as we work towards improving the lives of *all* Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Anthony's Circle Board of Directors

Rhonda Meadows, Anthony & Aleisha Preston, Maria Ponzi, Heidi Grenley and Janet Cathcart